

Yes, Dear

by LJ9

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Summary: Hiccup and Merida are paired up for a project in their economics class.

Yes, Dear

**\*\*Disclaimer:\*\*** I don't own a dang thing, especially not Indiana Jones (to my eternal dismay). The characters' opinions about "Kingdom of the Crystal Skull" are theirs and not necessarily mine.

I saw a post, originally by digivolvin, on Tumblr about the fake-marriage trope and immediately started wondering about how to apply it to Merida and Hiccup. This is the result.

I think the project itself is self-explanatory. It's not the one where you have to carry around a baby doll/bag of flour/egg and take care of it, though.

\* \* \*

><p>"Four kids," he muttered, staring down at the paper in front of him. "Figures."<p>

The randomly-assigned partner thing could have turned out much worse. He'd been dreading the family life project all semester, especially the part where his grade would depend on working with someone not of his choosing. At least there'd been no chance of getting stuck with Snotlout—this was an honors class, after all. And as well as he and his ex-girlfriend could still work well together, it might have been more than a little awkward having a fake family with Astrid. There was no doubt that they would have gotten an A, but he wasn't sure the good grade would have been worth the discomfort. Yeah, he could have been paired up with someone much worse than Merida, even if he didn't know her that well.

She shrugged and reached out to slide the paper toward her. "Probably

runs in the family. I'm one of four."

He looked up at her, turning over what he knew of her. It wasn't much; this was only her second year at the school, and the first class they'd had together. She'd never seemed really interested in economics, but she certainly wasn't stupid, that was obvious.

"Really?"

"Yep. I'm the oldest, and my brothers are triplets." She raised an eyebrow at him, as if daring him to ask about it; when he didn't, she turned her attention to the sheet. "You?"

He shook his head until he realized that she couldn't see him. "Only child. I don't think I'm prepared for four kids."

One corner of her mouth quirked up. "Lucky for you, these won't require much expertise." She tapped a finger against another handout, the one with the project's requirements. "Right, first order of business is our background. The kids' names, how we met, all that." She swung her knees around, angling her body toward him, and leaned on the elbow planted on the desk. Beneath her tights a rough patch of red bloomed on her knee, and he wondered idly if it would scar, and if she would care.

Her eyes looked past his head, toward the small window that only faced out on more classrooms, there more for light than for the view. "We metâ€¦"

"At university?" That seemed easy enough, especially since the story wasn't that important to the project. He flipped to a new page in his notebook and waited with pen poised, glancing at her for approval.

The eyes flicked down to him, startlingly bright in the fluorescent light. "Is that what you want? Go to uni, meet a girl and marry her, have a job and a house and four kids?"

"For the purposes of this project, some of that's nonnegotiable."

"But not in real life."

Of course not. Since he'd lost his leg, he figured that the worst had already happened, so why not indulge his adrenaline-junkie side? Yeah, he would go to university at some point, get that degree and job, but the life his dad expected of him, the one she'd just described, could wait. There was a lot he wanted to do first. He shook his head. Was he so transparent, or was she projecting, or did all teenagers just want a little adventure?

She smiled and cocked her head, ponytail swaying slightly behind her, eyes never leaving his face. Slowly she said, "We met in Peru. Both of us were on the way to Machu Picchu, and we decided to go on together."

It turned out she was a natural storyteller. Hiccup jotted notes while she talked, content to let her fill in the details about sharing a tent in the Amazon, drinking highly alcoholic local beverages, quoting Indiana Jonesâ€¦

"I'm not marrying you if you like 'Crystal Skull.'"

At the interruption her eyes widened, and for a second he thought she was going to snap at him. Then she grinned. "Aw, come on," she said, "it's not that bad."

"No no no. The right way to phrase that is 'It \_wasn't\_ that bad,' which is not true, by the way. Saying 'It's not that bad' makes it sound like you've seen it more than once, maybe even like you own it." He fixed her with a mock-stern look.

Innocently she asked, "What, you don't like the monkeys?"

He spluttered incoherently, with too many ways to condemn the monkeys and the rest of the movie fighting for precedence, until her chuckle broke through his indignation. He flushed a bit, feeling stupid, but the laughter was kind, and a smile crept hesitantly onto his face.

"Guess we should get back to our own monkeys," she said. "What do you think, two of each?"

"That seems fair. I'd hate to be a boy with three sisters." He shuddered a little.

"What shall we call them?"

Without thinking he said, "Valerie." Dad had always called her Val, though.

If Merida noticed that his attention had traveled somewhere beyond her, she didn't mention it, only saying quietly, "That's a lovely name for our firstborn." Her voice brought him back to their task and he ducked his head, eyes trained on his pen as he wrote the name carefully. In a more normal tone she went on, "What do you think of Alasdair for one of the boys?"

Hiccup nodded and added it to the page, raising his head. Then he tapped the pen against his chin in thought. "How about Brody for the other boy?"

She laughed again, boisterously, and he grinned as she got the joke. He wasn't about to suggest that they name one of them after Indiana Jones, but a subtle homage to Marcus Brody would be cool. "He'll have a terrible sense of direction," she warned.

"I never get lost. He must get it from your side of the family."

"Hey, I am brilliant with direction!" One of her legs stretched out beneath his chair and bumped against his prosthetic; he froze at the contact, though it seemed to have little effect on her. The carelessness was refreshing at least, that was one word for it, though it didn't quite capture the sudden lightheadedness and lurching in his gut. Did she even \_know\_ about his leg, or did she just not care?

He pushed the thought, more exciting than it should have been, aside to choke out, "We still need one more name."

She was quiet for a minute before offering, almost shyly, "Emma?" He just managed to nod before the bell rang and she bolted into action, twisting to scoop up her bag and shove papers into it. "Gotta run, my next class is all the way across campus. See you!" As she sped out of the classroom she clapped a hand on his shoulder.

He wrote Emma, and then closed his notebook and slid it into his bag.

\* \* \*

><p>They got twenty minutes at the end of the next day's class to work on their project. After their relative success working together the day before he'd been looking forward to seeing Merida again; it was shockingly easy to talk to her, even when she was watching him with those blue eyes. But today she radiated rage, the lips that had laughed now pressed into a bloodless line, and sat stiffly next to him. Part of him wanted to ask what had her so upset, but a second glance at her hands, tightly clenched on the edges of her chair, made him choose caution. Instead Hiccup pulled out their instructions and opened his laptop. "One of us makes \$75,000 a year, and the other one makes \$35. That's not too bad. Better if we didn't have four kids, butâ€¦" Her glare now focused on him made him trail off. He cleared his throat and went on doggedly, "So we have to figure out what jobs we have that make that much money." Fingers tapping at the keyboard as he brought up Google, he asked himself under his breath, "What can I do that'll make me 75 grand a year?"<p>

"What makes you think you'll be earning more than me?" she snapped, voice louder than necessary. His head whipped up to see her nostrils flared and eyes narrowed.

"I, uhâ€¦" In the background he saw Fishlegs looking at him in concern. If anything, her voice grew in volume as she went on, and he squirmed.

"You just assumed that the man would earn more? Not that you are a man," she added scornfully, gaze dismissive as it flicked over him.

Hiccup's throat constricted, hot and tight. "Fine," he said shortly, "you can make more." Out of the corner of his eye he thought her expression relaxed, but he didn't care to check, and they worked silently for the rest of the period. It was just a stupid assignment, he told himself more than once as he clicked on dismal salary reportsâ€¦for \$35,000 a year he could be a flight attendant, or a roofer, or a massage therapist, and damn, had this assignment gotten depressing fastâ€¦but he'd hoped she would be someone he could enjoy working with, who wouldn't dump all of the work on him and then take credit for half of it. He'd hoped to be accepted as he was for once, as just a classmate, without the years of screw-ups and failures hanging over his head. But that was stupid, because it was just a dumb assignment. The tension didn't leave his shoulders until he was safely in AP Calc, lost in solving equations.

\* \* \*

><p>Without speaking she slid a torn-off corner of loose-leaf toward him. He didn't move to take it, though he couldn't help glancing at it: clearly a phone number, written in quick, loose digits. He raised

an eyebrow and turned his attention back to his notes, scribbling down information about the GDP and leaving the scrap where it lay.<p>

After a moment another note, this one larger, came his way.

\_Can I have yours?\_

If they were going to pass notes, it'd be less noticeable if she were sitting to his left. He scowled, but anger and curiosity got the better of him. \_Why?\_ he scrawled, and shoved the paper back before he could add \_So you can make fun of me some more?\_

\_In case we need to get in touch for the project.\_

It made sense, no matter how much he disliked it. When he didn't respond, she pulled the paper back again.

\_And because if I'd had it yesterday, I could have said I'm sorry earlier.\_

\_You could have led with it today.\_

A tiny smile appeared on her lips when she read that. She wrote furiously, chewing her bottom lip, and out of the corner of his eye he watched her hand move, pale fingers wrapped around a pen with bite marks in it.

\_I am sorry. I shouldn't have snapped at you. I got a voicemail from my mum right before class that pissed me off, and I took it out on you. I didn't mean it, I was just talking out of my arse. I do that too much when I'm mad. But it \_\_\*\*was\*\*\_\_ a bit sexist to assume that you'd make more money.\_

He stifled a sigh. Part of him wanted to hold on to his anger—he hadn't done anything wrong, and he hadn't deserved what she'd said—but most of him just wanted to move on. Holding a grudge wouldn't make the project any easier, the explanation was more than plausible and the apology seemed sincere. And despite the snapping, he kind of liked her, with her refusal to go the expected route, even if just in fiction, and the way she laughed. \_You're probably right\_, he wrote, then scratched out the \_probably\_. Before he sent the note back he changed the period into a comma and added \_dear\_ to the end, biting his cheek so he wouldn't smile.

She snorted, covering her mouth with her hand and looking away. While she wasn't looking he slipped the first note toward him and entered her number into his phone. A few seconds later he heard the buzz of a phone vibrating and her hand slipped into her bag.

Maybe he hadn't thought it through all the way, but he didn't expect her to read the text—"Guess I should be glad I have a sugar mama to make up for my pitiful salary"—right then. He definitely didn't expect her to start laughing so hard she had to leave the room. When the rest of the class turned to stare at him, he kept a straight face as best he could and shrugged.

\* \* \*

><p>On Friday afternoon she caught him before last period. "Practice

got cancelled," she said, and he dimly recalled that she played field hockey before she went on, "so do you want to come to mine after school to work on the project for a bit? If you're not doing anything."<p>

He didn't, so he shrugged. "Sure."

And so he found himself in her car, praying to survive her insane driving as she sped through the parking lot; after the initial shock had passed he found himself enjoying the ride, just on the right side of reckless. It turned out that they didn't live too far from each other, though Merida's family lived further from school, on a huge lot just barely within city limits. A small forest rose behind the stone house; the whole picture would have been much more imposing without the bikes on the lawn and the flowers in pots by the front door. Off to one side the garage was open, with the telltale clink of tools coming from within. As Merida parked, gravel flying, a man emerged from the garage. Hiccup hadn't ever met anyone else the size of this own father, but this man was nearly as big. A wide smile split his face even as Merida slammed the door. Hiccup climbed out more slowly, grabbing his bag from the backseat.

"Hi, Dad!"

"Hullo, dear." His accent was even more pronounced than hers; Hiccup wondered if she toned it down for school.

"What are you up to?"

He jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "The boys thought they could turbo-charge the ATV."

"How'd they try to do that?"

He looked more chagrined than a big man ought to. "Whisky." Merida made a noise that sounded more amused than anything else and he went on, "Luckily I found them before they started it up. I've drained the tankâ€"waste of petrol that was."

"And whisky?" Merida's expression was angelic, and Hiccup ducked his head, not sure if his grin would be appreciated. With his gaze lowered, he noticed that Merida's dad had a prosthetic leg, too, though it was much more traditional than his. He looked up sharply at Merida, who just smiled, knowing and warm. His mouth half opened, to say what he didn't know, but her dad cut him off.

"Look, lass, you've let me go and make a fool of myself in front of your friend. Fergus DunBroch," he said, offering a large hand. Hiccup shook it and introduced himself.

"Hiccup's my partner in our econ assignment. We're going to work on it for a bit."

"Haddock, eh? Any relation to Stoick?" He didn't wait for Hiccup to answer before he did it himself. "Of course you are, look at you. You couldn't belong to anyone else."

Hiccup wasn't totally sure how to take that, but it felt kind of nice. Merida, on the other hand, rolled her eyes. "Dad, don't be so weird. He's not a puppy; he belongs to himself." Her actions seemed

to belie her words as she clasped his wrist with fingers warmer than they looked and tugged. "We have to go work on our project."

Mr. DunBroch nodded genially. "All right, off you go." As they walked toward the house he called, "Nice meeting you!" Still being towed by Merida, Hiccup half-turned and waved over his shoulder.

She dropped his hand to open the door and led the way through the house. It was obvious that someone in the family had good taste; based on what he knew of Merida and now her dad, he assumed her mom had been in charge of the decorating. They ended up in the kitchen, where Merida tossed him a few pieces of fruit from a heaping bowl and opened the fridge. "What d'you want to drink? Water, soda, milk, juice?" She withdrew her head from inside and smirked at him. "Whisky?"

"It is five o'clock somewhere," he joked, and her smirk widened to a grin, enough to make him think that maybe she was crazy enough to take him at his word. Then again, he was pretty sure you didn't keep whisky in the fridge, and she was reaching in. She reemerged with a bottle of lemonade in each hand, then bumped the door shut. The sway of her hips as she straightened and walked away left him frozen in place for a moment, until he shook his head and hurried after her.

45 minutes later she groaned and dropped her pencil on top of one of the many forms that covered the table. "Can't we just hire a CPA to figure out our taxes?"

"It's not that bad." In fact, they were almost done, but he straightened up from his slump, closing his eyes, stretching his arms over his head and feeling his back crack. When he opened his eyes again he saw her studying him before she looked away quickly. "At least we can work on it together."

"Right, because I'm helping so much."

He smiled across the table at her, head cocked. "You found all the receipts. And you're watching the kids while I work on this. That's helpful."

It was probably a little weird that they talked like this, like they really were married. He didn't get the sense that any of the other teams in their class were doing the same thing; there was no way Astrid was letting Fishlegs get away with it. Astrid was many things, but excessively imaginative wasn't one of them. He'd bet anything that Astrid and Fishlegs' story was that they'd been set up by mutual friends in college. Legs could have come up with a good story if he got the chance; Hiccup hoped he had.

Maybe Hiccup had been luckier than he thought when he got Merida for his partner.

Whether she thought the pretending was weird or not, he couldn't tell; she just groaned again and dropped her head into one hand. "Four kids. Me, of all people, with four kids. Not all of us would survive."

"Sure you would." He pushed a few buttons on the calculator and entered the answer into line 12. "Didn't you help take care of your

little brothers?"

She shrugged. "When I couldn't get out of it. They're terrors."

"No doubt inspired by their big sister." \_Why\_ had he said that? His dad was rightâ€"one day he was going to make some flippant little comment and it was going to get him in big trouble.

But she just nodded, evidently satisfied. "Damn right they are. Though I think they're worse than me. Two heads may be better than one, but three can come up with a lot more mischief. The whisky in the gas tank was nothing compared to some of their other tricks." Even though the majority of his attention was on their tax return he could tell she was smiling now, just from the sound of her voice. He let his eyes flick up to her. The smile on her face was one he hadn't seen before: it was fond and proud and just a little fierce. He nodded to himself.

"Yeah, you'll be a good mom."

"What makes you so sure, Mr. Only Child?" she demanded, though when he shook his hair out of his eyes and looked up at her, she seemed pleased. He stared at her for a moment as he thought; the longer he looked, the pinker her cheeks got, and the higher her chin raised, ever defiant. That's how he knew. He just hoped his certainty didn't sound weird.

"They'd be yours," he said simply. "And you take care of what's yours."

It was his turn to be scrutinized, but he was ready, and met her gaze levelly. It swept across his face, unexpectedly gentle, and when she murmured "Aye, I do," it sounded strangely like a promise.

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><p>The rain came out of nowhere on Monday morning. Between classes girls huddled in the hallways, chattering loudly about how terrible their hair looked now, or shrieked as they ran from building to building; a bunch of freshman boys kicked water from puddles at each other as they went from the locker room to the gym for PE.<p>

As Hiccup picked himself up, cold water already soaking into the knees of his jeans, he wished he'd remembered the dip right by the curb there, the one now obscured by the water filling it and the water falling into his eyes. He wiped his hands on his hips and walked more cautiously toward class. Even when he got into the hallway it wouldn't be much better goingâ€"inside the linoleum floor would be slick with rainwater from his classmates' shoes. His leg already throbbed with the sudden change in barometric pressure; he didn't want to fall again. Now he was going to be late, but he sure as hell wasn't going to get a pass, even though the office had promised he could have one whenever his \_circumstances\_ called for it. He gritted his teeth. Anyone could have tripped there, even with two good legs; he wasn't about to blame his clumsiness on his prosthetic.

A sub lounged behind the desk, doing a crossword puzzle; she glanced up from the newspaper at his dripping hair and then to his foot where it squeaked on the worn flooring. Whatever she'd been about to say

about him being tardy fled as her expression changed to one of pity, and he scowled. Across the room Fishlegs waved; he jerked his chin up in response. Merida had her laptop open, a photo of a two-story house on the screen. Her face looked less vibrant than usual, but then again so did everything else with the sky so dark outside. Still, she smiled as he made his way to his seat, and he couldn't help but feel a bit less bitter, little as he wanted to.

"Hey," she said as he dropped his backpack and sat. She was watching, he could tell that, but he didn't look at her. When he didn't respond her smile faltered, and she asked, "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," he said, words clipped.

She frowned. "I was just worriedâ€"

"You shouldn't have been." That was the last thing he needed. "I can take care of myself."

He heard her sharp inhalation and tensed, ready for her to snap back at him; instead she let out a quiet breath and pushed her computer toward him, then scooted her chair nearer to his. Still feeling ornery, he ignored the warmth radiating from her and looked at the price of the house. He shook his head. "That's way too much."

It was almost a comfort when her tone was sharp. "I know that, I'm not stupid. I was just looking." She jammed her fists in her armpits, arms crossed over her chest, and pouted; that was what softened him, her lower lip poked out childishly, full and rosy pink. He took a deep breath and slid his chair toward hers, then leaned forward to take a closer look at the real estate listing.

"It's a nice house, though."

"I thought so." The words were still stiff and stilted, so he looked over his shoulder at her, forcing cold lips to turn up at the corner. She glanced at him once, quickly, before returning her attention to the house.

"Maybeâ€|" He did some quick mental calculations. "We couldn't afford it now, but maybe in a couple of years."

She tilted her head, turning her full attention to him, and his heart thudded as he waited for her to react. After a few seconds she leaned forward, her arm brushing his as she clicked back through the browser, her face reflecting the same growing contentment he felt.

\* \* \*

><p>The project was due the next Monday, and the week between was unusually busy, with practices all week and then a game for Merida on Thursday afternoon, and Hiccup's dad demanding family time with him (and Gobber, of course) on Friday. They still had to put the project together, with all of the illustrations and charts and newspaper clippings and printouts that their teacher demanded, so he invited Merida over on Saturday afternoon to work on it. As the time for her to arrive neared he found himself feeling unexpectedly nervous, tidying the living room unnecessarily while Toothless watched from his bed, head on his paws, unmoved by his human's consternation.<p>

The bell rang ten minutes after she said she'd be there, and he ran a hand through his hair as he went to open the door. "Hi."

"Hi. Sorry I'm late." Her grin was unrepentant and infectious.

"No problem. Um, come on in." He stood back and she swept past him, the light scent of some unfamiliar flower following her. He gave her a brief tour of the house before leading her into the living room, toward the big table at the back. Toothless raised his head with eyes shining as she entered, and Hiccup fretted for a second over whether she would be scared of him, or allergic.

He needn't have worried. Her eyes did get wide as the dog stood, but it was the wideness of wonder, not of fear. She dropped into a crouch in front of him and offered a fist for him to sniff. When she had her arms around his neck, heedless of the black hairs attaching themselves to her clothes, she turned to Hiccup and accused, "You didn't tell me you had a dog."

"I might have, if I'd known you'd love him so much. His name's Toothless, by the way."

It took another ten minutes before she left off petting and joined Hiccup at the table. Their papers—tax forms, car insurance, student loans, mortgage, car payments, utility bills, medical insurance, grocery receipts—covered the surface, and they began the boring process of putting things in order. After half an hour of working quietly, punctuated by Merida's increasingly frequent sighs, Hiccup stood and went to the TV across the room. He turned on the TV, slipped a disc into the slot, and pressed play.

A grin lit her face as Dr. Jones and company emerged from the jungle at the beginning of "Raiders of the Lost Ark." "I knew there was a reason I married you," she said, as satisfied as if he had actually been her choice of partner all along. He smiled, but inside his heart sank when he realized that after they turned everything in, this would be over. Their fake relationship would dissolve. The thought of it left a heavy empty space behind his sternum.

By the time "Temple of Doom" was halfway finished, they were done. Everything was arranged and neatly stapled, and Hiccup felt a sense of accomplishment at a job well done. He slipped the project into his bag as Merida made her way to the couch, Toothless padding after her. "Is he allowed up?" she asked over her shoulder.

"Not technically." He leaned on the back of the couch and watched Indy and Willie arguing on the screen, then looked at Merida. Toothless had his head on her knee and she was running her hand over his soft ears. He half hated that she looked so comfortable in his life when her part in it was about to shrink. He squashed that thought as he pushed back up straight. "Guess we'll need some popcorn if we're going to finish the trilogy."

"There are four movies!" she called after him.

They went through two and a half bags of popcorn and a bottle of sparkling apple cider that he'd found in the back of the fridge. He got up to put on "The Last Crusade" and when he returned to his seat, yawning a little, it seemed like she was closer than she'd been

before, shifting still nearer with the dip of the cushions as he sat. She was sitting to his right, just like she did in class, her braid over her far shoulder. The way she was leaning, he reasoned, it would be more comfortable for both of them if he put his arm up—“not necessarily \_around\_ her, just—up. Higher. So it wasn't stuck between them all awkwardly, like it was now.

Except now his arm didn't seem to be obeying any commands his brain sent its way. The longer he sat, mentally glaring at his rebellious appendage, the less confident he was about the plan. How was he supposed to move without knocking her over, or hitting her in the face? She probably didn't want him to touch her—“though if that were true, she wouldn't have moved so close, with one leg tucked under the other and the sock-covered sole of her foot grazing the outside of his knee.

She leaned forward to get a sip of her apple cider and he moved before he could talk himself out of it, lifting his arm and letting it kind of hover in midair in what was probably a creepy manner until she sat back. Then he dropped it lightly around her shoulders, where it lay tense and stiff.

"Very smooth," she huffed, eyes on the screen, and his face burned. She didn't move away, though, or demand that he move; instead she wriggled slightly until his arm relaxed. Her braid tickled his skin, and he let his hand drift lower, to wind the curling ends of it around his finger. Her hair was softer than he'd thought it would be, a softness that he suddenly wanted to run his fingers through, to feel against his palm. The fact that he couldn't do just that seemed entirely unfair, and he started to frown. Then she let out a sigh, quiet and pleased, that stoked the blooming warmth in his chest.

\* \* \*

><p>As the credits ended she murmured, "I'd better go," and the sinking feeling returned. But he moved his arm and stood. As they left, Toothless whined in his sleep, and Hiccup sympathized with him. He led the way through the quiet house to the front door; it wasn't until they got to her car and she had to dig around for her keys that he realized they'd been holding hands.<p>

The door was open and she was about to slide behind the wheel before he found his voice. "Merida—"

She looked nothing short of beautiful with the porch light on her upturned face, and his stomach knotted. "Yeah?"

He wanted to kiss her. How pathetic was that? Two weeks of working together on a project and he was hopelessly infatuated. But it had been two weeks of teasing and bickering, of eye rolling and laughing, of learning a hell of a lot more than he'd ever thought the project could teach him; now she stood waiting, expression unexpectedly sweet, and he still felt her hair curling around his index finger, her foot against his knee. No one could blame him for wanting to kiss her, and no one would blame him if he tried. He licked his lips and said, "Text me when you get home."

Until he fell asleep he'd debate himself on whether or not she'd looked disappointed. Still, she half-smiled and said, "Yes, dear," before she got in and drove away.

He took the cups and popcorn bowls into the kitchen, turned off the TV and shut off all the lights, trudged upstairs with Toothless at his heels, and fell backward onto his bed. When his phone buzzed a few minutes later he tugged it from his pocket and read the message.

\_I'm home. Thanks for letting me stay so long.\_

His thumbs hovered over the screen and his teeth worried his lower lip as he considered his reply. \_No problem\_ was too casual; \_It was my pleasure\_ was too formal. He settled for \_I had fun\_, then added a \_Thanks\_ for good measure.

\_We should have date night more often\_, she said, and it felt like he'd just gone down the first big drop on a roller coaster, his breath shallow and his stomach fluttering and floating in his abdomen.

\_Sure. If we can find a babysitter who'll agree to watch your kids.\_

\_My kids? They're just as much yours as mine.\_

\_They get the rebelliousness from you, though.\_

\_And they get the sassiness from you.\_ There was a pause during which he considered how rambunctious their fake children would be; she must have been doing the same, because her next text said, \_We're doomed, aren't we?\_

Kids or no, he was, completely. \_Pretty much.\_

A long moment passed before her response came. \_My battery's dying, I better go. See you on Monday. Sleep well.\_

\_Good night, Merida.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Third period was there before he knew it. Even on test days he hadn't dreaded going to class this much.<p>

Around him, people were talking about how happy they were that the assignment was over. Hiccup was vaguely aware that Fishlegs was talking to him, though he wasn't paying much attention. "Don't get me wrong, I'm glad Astrid was my partner and I know our project is literally flawless, but working with her was exhausting. She's always so \_intense\_, you know?"

"What? Oh, yeah," he mumbled.

"Uh, Hiccup?" Fishlegs sounded uncertainâ€"and given the experience he'd probably just been describing, Hiccup couldn't blame him. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine." He gave an unconvincing smile. Fishlegs, eyes narrowed skeptically, opened his mouth to say something, but then Astrid came in and he was sucked away in her wake. Hiccup stared down at the report on his desk, their names linked by an ampersand.

There was the usual rush just before the bell rang, and she dropped into her seat. Her hair was down and she wore a blue dress with leggings underneath, and he wanted it to be Saturday night again. She gave him a halfhearted smile as their teacher stood in the front of the room.

"All right, ladies and gentlemen, time's up. Pass your projects, bribes, or extraordinarily good excuses in now!" Merida turned to take the project being passed up and Hiccup slid theirs on top; then he watched as their project ended, their names linked together for the last time, and he sighed.

As the teacher passed out a handout, Merida glanced at him. When the lecture began she took notes sporadically, apparently just as uninspired by economics as he was. Eventually she ripped out a sheet of notebook paper and wrote something before shoving it toward him hastily. He looked at her, but she wouldn't meet his eyes.

\_Come over Friday night?\_

Again with the passing notes from the right side of her desk all the way over to the left side of his. How they hadn't gotten caught yet was a mystery. \_What for?\_ he wrote, trying not to let the buoyant, electric sensation under his skin that he thought was hope get too out of control.

\_To finish watching the Indiana Jones films, of course.\_ He smirked at that. \_Besides, I'll probably miss you by then.\_

He bit his lip. Then, decisively, he crossed out \_probably\_ and wrote \_DEFINITELY\_ above it.

A grin split her face when she read it, and she reached over and took his hand in hers. Their linked hands dangled between their chairs for the rest of the period, and he knew by the whispers he heard behind them that their classmates had noticed. If they hadn't, they noticed when he turned to her once the bell rang, pulled her close with a hand on the back of her neck, and kissed her.

Their classmates whistled and catcalled, and their teacher yelled at them to get their nonsense out of his classroom, so they fled, blushing. Once outside he rubbed the back of his neck and fought through the embarrassment to look at her. Her face was as red as his felt, but she didn't seem about to hit him—"as a matter of fact, the fingers that weren't wrapped around his went to her lips and touched them lightly, and he felt proud about putting that wide-eyed, speechless expression on her face.

He hadn't thought past kissing her, though, and he wasn't sure what kissing her in the middle of their econ classroom meant about their future together. "So, um—" was as far as he got before she surged upward, wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing him fiercely until they were interrupted by the warning bell.

"Friday night," she said breathlessly, her exhalations tickling his neck. "We're not done yet."

For the moment the only future that mattered was four days away. Everything after that they'd figure out in due time. He chuckled

suddenly, heart light in his chest and hand heavy on her waist, and said, "Yes, dear."

End  
file.